



SENTENCING IN WISCONSIN

Snapshots of Information on Wisconsin Sentencing

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The Wisconsin Sentencing Commission: Reports and Activities for 2004

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The Wisconsin Sentencing Commission began full operation in January 2004. Its duties under Wisconsin Statutes, Chapter 973, include (1) collecting and reporting state sentencing data, (2) adopting advisory sentencing guidelines for felonies committed on or after July 20, 2002, (3) providing correctional cost impact information to the state legislature and agencies as well as the public, (4) producing periodic reports on sentencing topics, (5) assisting the legislature in costing out effects of new or proposed sentencing legislation, and (6) analyzing the effect of race on state sentencing practice.

The Commission is composed of twenty-one members representing all three branches of government, prosecution and defense, criminal justice practitioners, and citizens, including a victims' representative. The Commission's permanent committees are Sentencing Guidelines, Data and Research, and Public Outreach. The Commission chair is former circuit court judge Susan Steingass. Michael Connelly, executive director, formerly directed Maryland's State Commission on Criminal Sentencing Policy and has a Ph.D. in political science from the University of Missouri. Jim Pingel, deputy director, worked in crime analysis in the mayor's office in Milwaukee and has an M.P.A. from the La Follette Institute at the University of Wisconsin.

The Commission has posted a public website at <http://wsc.wi.gov>. The website contains the Commission's composition and legislative history, data and reports on state sentencing and guideline use, minutes and agendas of past meetings, and links to other data and reports relevant to state sentencing policy. The Commission has analyzed for possible action materials and presentations on correctional costs and benefits, problem-oriented sentencing, the effect of race in Wisconsin criminal justice, felony classification under Truth in Sentencing, and presentence investigation recommendations.

The Commission is currently studying improvement of presentence assessment, design of a study of disproportionate minority representation in the sentencing process, and revision of the current, temporary sentencing guidelines worksheets. Reports will be posted to the website this year as they are completed. A major component of the Commission's efforts through 2004 will be development of a sentencing database constructed through merger of relevant data from the courts, the state Department of Corrections, and the current worksheets. A stated purpose of these activities is to establish the Commission as an important and reliable resource of data, research, and information on sentencing for judges, policymakers, and the public.

The Wisconsin Sentencing Commission periodically publishes "Sentencing in Wisconsin" to provide the public and state courts and policymakers data on state sentencing practices. For other publications, or more information about the Commission, see its website, <http://wsc.wi.gov> or call 608-261-5049.